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ABSTRACT

Emotional disturbance was rated by teachers, parents, and the school psychologist for a group of 104 children diagnosed as severely emotionally disturbed; black and white as well as male and female students were included. Teachers were found significantly more severe in their judgments than the school psychologist on the behavior and socialization scales of the Referral Checklist, but not on communication. The teacher rating profile was also found to deviate from parallelness from the other raters with increased severity in the behavior scale. None of the nine correlations between judges on the same scales were significant. The results suggest a reappraisal of the referral process. Since the severely emotionally disturbed group of children is probably composed of multiple clinically diagnosed groups, multiple psychological profiles may need to be considered in diagnosis. If there is little agreement on the theory of what an emotionally disturbed child is, little relationship would exist between judges' ratings of actual emotionally disturbed children. (Author/RD)

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Behavior Ratings of Emotionally Disturbed Children
By Teachers, Parents, and School Psychologists

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Abstract

Emotional disturbance was rated by teachers, parents, and the school psychologist for a group of 104 children diagnosed as severely emotionally disturbed. Teachers were found significantly more severe in their judgments than the school psychologist on the Behavior and Socialization scales of the Referral Checklist, but not on Communication. The teacher rating profile was also found to deviate from parallelness from the other raters with increased severity in the Behavior scale. None of the nine correlations between judges on the same scales were significant. Interpretations and possible implications are offered.

Behavior Ratings of Emotionally Disturbed Children

By Teachers, Parents, and School Psychologists

Federal Regulation P. L. 94 - 142 mandates that all children are to be served by local educational districts according to their individual needs. Incumbent in this process is the identification of groups of children requiring special services because of their unique characteristics. The severely emotionally disturbed are such a group of children often identified for special services in educational settings. One method that has often been used to identify these children is the use of behavior rating checklists.

The child might be assessed on a checklist by a variety of individuals including teachers, parents, and psychological professionals. In combining this information for placement of the child, it is of considerable importance to understand the nature and degree of agreement or disagreement between these groups.

The literature indicates some discrepancy between various groups in their perception of the important behavioral characteristics of the emotionally disturbed child. When ranking problem priorities for emotionally disturbed children, Auger (1975) found that special education teachers attached more importance to personality problems than parents, with parents more concerned with delinquent behaviors. On the other hand, Fremont, Klingsporn, and Wilson (1976) found that teachers did not differentiate between personality and conduct problems in their priority rating. Psy-

chiatrists, and clinical psychologists, however, were found to rate personality problems more important. Paraskevopoulos and McCarthy (1970) found the factor structure for the ratings of the importance of different types of problems in agreement for learning disabled and emotionally disturbed children, and that factor scores derived from the ratings of mothers' and teachers' on a sample of learning disabled children were significantly correlated for conduct and immaturity factors, but not for the personality factor. In addition, an analysis of variance suggested that the shape of the rater's profile across the three factors differed between mothers and teachers, with more immaturity problems seen by teachers. Bower (1957) found that teachers agreed with psychiatrists, psychologists, and counselors on 87 percent of the children which these clinicians had previously classified as emotionally disturbed.

The purpose of this study was to examine the differences and relationships between ratings of severely emotionally disturbed children by teachers, parents, and the school psychologists. While former studies of this nature seem concentrated on differences between raters in level of priority given to problems for the theoretical diagnostic group of emotionally disturbed children, this study will examine both differences in level and degree of relationship between rater groups on actual emotionally disturbed children.

METHOD

Subjects

There were 104 children who were admitted to the Lawton B. Evans Psychoeducational Center in Augusta Georgia because of their diagnosed severe emotional disturbance. These children were rated on deviant behaviors as part of the screening requirements for admission to the Center by the regular classroom teacher who initially referred the child for psychological testing, the parents of the referred child with the help of a social worker, and the state certified

school psychologist who did the complete psychological assessment of the child. The sample of children was composed of 79 males, and 25 females; 59 Caucasians, and 44 Negroes. The mean age was 9 years and 2 months.

Materials

Three subscales of the Referral Checklist (Huberty, Quirk, and Swan, 1973) examining problem priorities in the areas of Behavior (24 items), Communication (14 items), and Socialization (10 items) were used for rating the Ss by all three groups as a routine component of the screening psychological assessment. This five-point Likert-type instrument was described by Swan (1976) as "used in eight different states in a number of programs and has been found to be consistently effective in producing information for decision makers." Items representing the thrust of the subscales are Behavior, "Resistant to discipline"; Communication, "Repeats unnecessarily"; Socialization, "Daydreams." Coefficient alpha reliabilities ranged from .55 to .88 across raters and subscales (Table 1).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In order to make the ratings comparable within raters across subscales with different numbers of items, as well as between raters on the same subscale, the score for each subscale was divided by the number of items in the subscale yielding the average item rating. Therefore, each subject had nine scores representing the rating of the teacher, parents, and school psychologist on the Behavior, Communication, and Socialization subscales.

Examination of the differences in level of problem priority ratings

for rater and subscale combinations mandates a repeated measures design which is typically addressed by the analysis of variance. Since any heterogeneity of covariance between ratings positively biases this F test, the exact multivariate Hotelling T^2 procedure was used, as recommended by McCall and Appelbaum (1973), to examine both the overall null hypothesis of equivalent ratings across the nine combinations, and certain a posteriori contrasts.

The overall null hypothesis of equivalent ratings across all nine scores was rejected by an F test derived from the Hotelling T^2 (see Morrison (1967), pp. 133 - 141); $F_{8/96} = 30.86$; $p < .0001$).

In addition, the Hotelling T^2 procedure provides for performing any number of linear a posteriori contrasts yielding F ratios while conserving error rate, in a similar manner to Sheffe' contrasts (Morrison, 1967). The first contrasts of interest were between rater groups across all subscales, comparing the average severity of the ratings between raters. Among the three possible pairwise comparisons between rater groups, only the contrast between teacher and school psychologist was significant ($F_{8/96} = 2.36$; $p < .05$). An examination of mean ratings in Table 1 reveals that teachers were more severe in the amount of problems they saw than the school psychologist, with further a posteriori comparisons suggesting more specifically that this difference was significant for the Behavior ($F_{8/96} = 2.46$; $p < .05$) and Socialization ($F_{8/96} = 2.03$; $p < .05$) subscales, but not for Communication. Further comparisons revealed that not only were the two other possible contrasts between teacher and parent, and parent and psychologist not significant for the average rating across subscales, but also for each subscale

taken separately.

Insert Table 1 about here

The discrepancy between the finding of no difference between teacher and parent mean ratings in this study and that of Auger (1975) may be attributable to the fact that in Auger's study the Ss were special education teachers rather than regular classroom teachers as in this study. The perception of the special education teachers may have migrated closer to that of the school psychologist due to their special training. The relevant point may be, however, that referrals usually come from regular classroom teachers, thus their perception is most relevant.

One might not be surprised that the classroom teacher is severe in judging the magnitude of the problems of the child since she was the source of the initial referral. There may be some disagreement within and between parents and the school psychologist, however, we can expect the teachers to be homogeneous in considering the child as deviant since this predisposition is reflected in the referral. While this result may not be surprising, it seems that it is important to consider in evaluating the ratings of the teacher.

Further contrasts within rater groups were conducted to ascertain the shape of the raters' profile of problem priorities. It may be noted (Table 1) that for all raters, Behavior was viewed as a more severe problem than either Communication or Socialization. This difference was verified for all raters by significant contrasts between Behavior and Communication

(Teachers, $F_{8/96} = 15.15$; $p < .01$; Parents, $F_{8/96} = 12.09$; $p < .01$; Psychologist, $F_{8/96} = 7.93$; $p < .01$), and Behavior and Socialization (Teachers, $F_{8/96} = 9.73$; $p < .01$; Parents, $F_{8/96} = 3.62$; $p < .01$; Psychologist, $F_{8/96} = 8.54$; $p < .01$), with non-significant contrasts between Communication and Socialization. While there was no difference between raters in the order of the problems in their profile, an exact multivariate test (see McCall, and Appelbaum, 1973) revealed that there was a significant interaction between raters and subscales ($F_{4/100} = 3.05$; $p < .05$), implying that all the rater profiles were not parallel across the subscales. Subsequent pairwise tests of interaction indicated that the teacher and parent profiles ($F_{2/102} = 5.00$; $p < .01$), and teacher and school psychologist profiles ($F_{2/102} = 4.40$; $p < .05$) were not parallel, but that the parent and school psychologist did have parallel profiles.

This analysis and an inspection of the rater profiles (Table 1) reveals that the teacher profile diverged from the other two with increased severity in the Behavior subscale. This result seems to support that of Paraskevopoulos and McCarthy (1970) with no overall difference found between mothers and teachers, but an interaction caused by teacher severity on the immaturity factor. The problems represented by the items of the Behavior subscale could be construed as arising from immaturity.

The intercorrelation matrix for the nine scores represented in Table 1 shows considerable relationship between subscales within each of the three raters. However, none of the correlations between raters on the same subscale (italicized) even reached significance. Moreover, this surprising lack of relationship cannot be reasonably attributed to attenuation in the cor-

relation due to measurement error, since only one correlation was significant (in the unexpected direction) when the correlations were corrected for this attenuation with the coefficient alpha reliabilities. Also, bivariate plots of the nine correlations did not suggest curvilinearity as an alternative explanation of these low relationships. The inevitable conclusion seems to be that there was no relationship between the ratings given by different raters of the severely emotionally disturbed children on the various subscales. This result is in conflict with the only other study found which considered the relationship between group's ratings rather than merely their difference in level of ratings. Paraskevopoulos and McCarthy (1970) found mothers' and teachers' factor scores significantly correlated on conduct and immaturity factors, however, no such relationships were found in this study.

Possible explanation for the discrepancy of finding no correlation between the ratings of teachers and school psychologists in this study and the findings of Bower (1957) may come from more than one source. The methodology in the Bower study was to ascertain how many children the teachers identified as emotionally disturbed who had been previously identified as such by the school psychiatrist, psychologist, or counselor. Since it is possible that the teachers originally referred many of the children to the clinician (not mentioned in the Bower study), there may be some circularity in that the teacher would naturally agree with the diagnosis that began with her. Also, only the percentage of those cases previously classified as disturbed by the clinician which the teacher correctly identified as disturbed was reported. The number of "misses" occurring when the teacher incorrectly classified a child as disturbed who was not disturbed was not reported. This could be misleading, especially since the teachers seem to be

more severe in their rating. Indeed, the teacher could correctly classify 100 per cent of the disturbed children by judging all children emotionally disturbed. The effect of this problem cannot be ascertained with only the knowledge of correct classifications. A final possibility may be that since the clinicians in Bower's study were affiliated directly with a school, and the school psychologists in this study were not, there may have been greater opportunity for the clinician to observe and correctly classify the child in the Bower Study.

Further investigation was undertaken to determine if there were any differences in ratings between male and female children. A discriminant analysis indicated that there was not a significant difference between the means of male and female Ss over all the nine rater and subscale combinations ($\chi^2 = 4.47$, $df = 9$, $p < .05$). An examination of the correlations between like subscales across raters separately for males and females proved similar to the result for the total sample. Among the 18 such correlations for sexes taken separately, the only significant correlation of $-.40$ ($p < .05$, again in the undesirable direction) was for females between teachers and parents on the Communication scale. It therefore seems that the sex of the child did not significantly effect ratings.

If one subscribes to the notion of Auger (1975, p. 867) that "a child's progression from home and school to a treatment facility can hardly be justified if parents of behaviorally deviant children, public school teachers, and special educators within the residential treatment center do not share a common frame of reference as to what shall be called seriously deviant behavior", the results of this study may suggest reappraisal of the refer-

ral process. Because of some commonality in their educational preparation, we should at least expect some level of agreement between the professionals; the teacher and school psychologist. It may be that the increased rating severity of the teacher over the school psychologist could be explained by the teacher's role of responsibility for the children. However, this difference in level of rating does not imply that the correlation between teacher's and psychologist's ratings would necessarily be small as was found in this study. Even with a difference in level, a high correlation could arise from relatively parallel ratings over children on a particular subscale for the teacher and school psychologist. The problem may be partially attributable to our fundamental conception of what an emotionally disturbed child is. Since the severely emotionally disturbed group of children is probably composed of multiple clinically diagnosed groups, multiple psychological profiles (see Guertin, 1966) may need to be considered in diagnosis. If there is little agreement on the theory of what an emotionally disturbed child is, as suggested in previous literature, we might expect little relationship between judges' ratings of actual emotionally disturbed children.

If ratings from different sources are to be combined in some additive fashion, interrater agreement, thus intercorrelation between raters, should be required. Perhaps the best idea for now would be to use behavior rating checklists cautiously, and independently from different rater sources, striving to understand their individual perceptual frame of reference and incorporating this into our interpretation.

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TABLE I
Means¹, Standard Deviations, Reliabilities², and Intercorrelations³
of the Referral Checklist Subscales for Different Raters

Raters	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	M	SD
Teacher											
1. Behavior	(.81)	.62	.61	<u>-.12</u>	-.14	-.16	<u>-.02</u>	-.13	-.15	3.24	.71
2. Communication	.94	(.55)	.62	-.27	<u>-.15</u>	-.10	-.05	<u>-.06</u>	-.09	3.90	.56
3. Socialization	.88	1.00	(.60)	-.15	-.13	<u>-.10</u>	-.10	-.02	<u>-.06</u>	3.78	.68
Parents											
4. Behavior	<u>-.15</u>	-.39	-.21	(.86)	.80	.61	<u>.01</u>	-.16	-.10	3.48	.80
5. Communication	-.17	<u>-.23*</u>	-.18	.98	(.77)	.69	.02	<u>-.06</u>	-.05	3.95	.72
6. Socialization	-.20	-.16	<u>-.16</u>	.79	.94	(.70)	-.05	-.08	<u>-.09</u>	3.86	.73
School Psychologist											
7. Behavior	<u>-.02</u>	-.07	-.14	<u>.01</u>	.02	-.06	(.88)	.74	.78	3.73	.83
8. Communication	-.17	<u>-.12</u>	-.02	-.21	<u>-.09</u>	-.11	.94	(.70)	.76	4.18	.57
9. Socialization	-.19	-.14	<u>-.09</u>	-.13	-.07	<u>-.13</u>	.99	1.00	(.71)	4.17	.65

Note Italicized correlations are between raters on "matched" subscales.

¹Mean item score ranging from 1 (High priority problem) to 5 (Not a problem, or not noticed).

²Coefficient alpha reliabilities are on the diagonal in ().

³Correlations corrected for unreliability attenuation below diagonal.

*p < .05